

Popular cop's arrest garners national attention

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2015 Cop Pedophile Joshua Spratt

NEW SCOTLAND —Two months after Watervliet's school superintendent called the Watervliet Police with concerns about the officer stationed at the high school, he was charged with criminal sexual acts against female students.

Joshua Spratt, 34, of New Scotland, was arrested by New York State Police this weekend and arraigned in Albany County Supreme Court on Monday, according to a release from the Albany County District Attorney's office.

"Some of the girls always had a crush on him," Superintendent Dr. Lori S. Caplan told The Enterprise Tuesday. Now, she said, everyone, "even the adults — everyone feels so betrayed."

Spratt was charged with four counts of a third-degree criminal sexual act, all felonies; and two counts of official misconduct, and endangering the welfare of a minor, all misdemeanors.

An indictment unsealed in court on Monday stated that Spratt engaged in four separate sexual acts with a 16-year-old student between Feb. 14 and April 10 in Watervliet and in Menands, the release said. The county's district attorney's office did not return calls before press time.

Spratt pleaded not guilty to the charges in court on Monday. Judge Thomas A. Breslin set bail at \$50,000.

The charges have been widely covered — from the New York Daily News to People magazine.

Andrew Safranko, of Clifton Park, Spratt's lawyer, told The Enterprise on Wednesday that people should withhold judgment until all the facts come out.

"He was a dedicated and devoted officer in Watervliet for over 10 years, loved within and without the department," said Safranko. "He was a veteran of the National Guard with two deployments — one in the United States at Fort Drum and the other in Iraq. He's spent his whole life protecting people."

Spratt is married with three children and lives on New Scotland Road in Slingerlands, his lawyer said.

Asked specifics about the charges, Safranko said, "All I have received is a record of the indictment. You know as much as I do."

According to the indictment filed in Albany County Court, Spratt was charged with four counts of a third-degree criminal sexual act for oral or anal sexual conduct with someone under the age of 17, with the encounters occurring in a parking lot, a Watervliet cemetery, near Third Avenue in Watervliet, and in a Menands cemetery. He was charged with endangering the welfare of a child, and with two counts of official misconduct for committing an act related to his office with the intent

TO OBTAIN A BENEFIT.

Asked what the defense would be, Safranko said, "At this time, we're weighing all the options...A lot of the story will unfold as time goes on."

Delayed investigation

"We first heard rumors regarding Mr. Spratt this spring and reported it to the Watervliet Police Department, which is exactly what we are supposed to do," wrote Caplan in a letter to parents this week. "The investigation was later turned over to the New York State Police, which resulted in Mr. Spratt's recent arrest."

Spratt served as a school resource officer at Watervliet High School for the past two years.

Caplan told The Enterprise that she called the Watervliet chief of police, Ronald A. Boisvert Jr., when she first heard rumors of text messages between Spratt and students.

"It was prom time, the first week in June," Caplan said. He listened to her concerns, checked with his staff, and told her, "You have absolutely nothing to worry about," Caplan said.

Three weeks later, Caplan heard more rumors about texting between Spratt and students, and she called the chief, again.

"He told me, 'I vetted him completely. You have absolutely nothing to worry about,'" Caplan said.

As a school officer, Spratt shared his text number with students, Caplan said.

"They had his text. He was a resource to them," she said.

The chief "was very convinced there was nothing going on. He believed him," Caplan said.

No one from the Watervliet Police Department was available for comment. The city's communications firm, Gramercy Communications, of Troy, issued a statement from the department: "We are aware of the arrest of a member of the police department and are fully cooperating with the State Police and their investigation at this time."

"It's a surprise to all," said Matt Cannon, Gramercy's director of public affairs, about Spratt's arrest. "No one knew what was going on."

As soon as there was a case against Spratt, Cannon said, the Watervliet department "turned it over to the State Police. You shouldn't investigate your own."

The Watervliet Police Department is cooperating with the State Police, Cannon said. Because Spratt is still under investigation, Cannon said, the department has asked no one to comment publicly.

Asked if the department had been notified of a problem in the spring, as Caplan said in her public letter, Cannon said that the Watervliet police called in the State Police "as soon as they found out last week. The state police got it turned over last week."

Betrayal

“The charges against Officer Spratt are devastating, and, if true, represent an egregious and unforgivable betrayal of the trust we all placed in him,” reads a statement on the Watervliet High School website. “As always, our primary concern is for the safety and well being of students. Our focus over the next few weeks will be helping them to come to terms with this betrayal.”

Caplan said that, after she reported the rumors to the police, she did not have staff monitor Spratt; she took the rumors for just that, she said.

“It really wasn’t a big deal,” she told The Enterprise. “No one had a bad feeling [about Spratt].”

Caplan noted that several students are 18 years old, and legal adults, and that Spratt was a young officer that girls found attractive. Caplan heard only rumors of texts, and she reported those, she said.

“Not a single person came to me,” she said. “It was just the rumor mill.

“There was never any tip-off to us,” Caplan continued. “He was not my employee. He would have been out of my school immediately. I don’t have to keep him employed.”

Caplan said that the previous school resource officer, Sergeant Mark Spain, served at the school for seven years.

“The SRO program has worked really well,” Caplan said. “The program works. It’s been very effective. The police department and I, and the district, have a good relationship. This is a bad apple, if he is, indeed, guilty.

“There’s a lot of healing that needs to happen,” she continued. “I’m focused on getting my school community back to trusting adults.”

She elaborated, “He’s a guest in my school. I’ve got a great staff. The community feels betrayed, the staff feels betrayed, and the students feel betrayed. That’s what I mean by ‘healing.’”

Caplan said that a district crisis team of teachers, administrators, and counselors would meet with students on Wednesday to help them process the news of Spratt’s arrest.

“It’s important for people to know that nobody’s going to put students in harm’s way,” Caplan concluded.

Updated on Aug. 3, 2015: Information was added to this story from the indictment, once it was received.